



5 Nov 1958 - Security of CORONA
(Memo by RMBJr.)

COR-0159

1. In order to conceal the true purpose of C, it is necessary not only to prevent disclosure of classified information but also to minimize revealing public speculation, especially in the trade press, about the extensive series of Thor launchings that will begin next month at Vandenberg AFB. These activities can readily be observed from outside the Base by the public and will inevitably in view of the current interest in space, attract wide attention. Accordingly, the desired concealment can be effected only by first developing and then giving appropriate circulation to a logical account of the nature and purpose of the series differing from the true purpose, that of aerial reconnaissance of the Soviet Union.

2. Though there has never been an official announcement concerning the Lockheed-developed 117L satellite recon system, a large amt of publicity has appeared in the daily press and trade publications over a pd. of many mos. which has revealed its development to the general public. These stories have been based on Congressional testimony, unofficial statements made in confidence or in public, and on unclassified technical discussion of the feasibility of such a system. Most of the stories have referred to the original SENTRY recon program scheduled for early 1960 rather than the 1959 COR (Thor) phase. They have never been denied for to have done so would merely have stimulated more uncontrolled and damaging discussion.

3. Although it would be impossible convincingly to deny that a satellite recon system is being developed for possible future use, it is believed that appropriate cover stories can explain the CORONA part of the program as a wholly separate activity directed to a number of legitimate scientific and technical purposes. These would be described as purposes which will contribute to the development of military technology but are not military in character. To further this plan several payloads are being developed that will actually be carried on certain flights in the Thor series so as to "live out" the cover story.

4. To give public circulation to the desired explanation it is deemed vital that at least a minimum amount of information be released and that normal announcements be made. To attempt to deny the press any information regarding the launchings will not only invite a penetration effort on the part of the opposition but create an air of mystery and encourage damaging speculation. At the same time it will be necessary to give

NRO review(s) completed.

consistent but much more complete technical explanations (which will be at least in part classified) to the considerable number of persons who do not need to know the true purpose of CORONA but are in a position to guess what it is unless they are provided with a convincing alternative explanation. These are mainly military and company personnel working at the launch site, in the recovery force, and in the companies and military organizations concerned with the series. (The cover stories are outlined in Attachment A.)

5. To accomplish the above, it is believed that a pre-series announcement should be made in the immediate future by ARPA describing the contemplated series in broad terms in accordance with the cover plan. It is also believed that each launching should have concomitant limited publicity.

Att:

A. Cover Plan Summary.

ATTACHMENT A:

1. Objectives (same)

2. Separation: The true nature and purpose of WS-117L has already been subj of such extensive public discussion and the number of persons in various contractor companies and military services knowledgeable of program is so large it is believed to be wholly infeasible to deny that a satellite recon system is being developed. Accordingly, to secure acceptance of an explanation of the COR firings which denies any connection with reconnaissance or with other inherently military activities, it is proposed that the whole Thor-boosted series of flights be described as an activity entirely separate from the WS-117L ~~xxxxxxx~~ program. The Thor (COR) series will be named "DISCOVERY" and its purpose will be explained as the development of a practical laboratory for the conduct of experiments leading to improved military systems. The Atlas series will continue to be known as SENTRY and no attempt will be made to conceal or deny the true nature of at least certain the payloads to be carried. To explain the association of Lockheed, which is the prime contractor for the SENTRY system, with the DISCOVERY series, it will be stated accurately that, on the basis of a variety of tech and scheduling considerations, the basic vehicle chosen for the D series is a THOR first stage combined with a SENTRY second stage. It is believed that the public is now fully familiar with the practice of using hardware originally developed as missile components to put scientific payloads into space.

3. Explanation of DISCOVERY: The major stated purpose of the DISCOVERY series will be the development of hardware ultimately useable for either military or peaceful scientific purposes. Specifically it will be said to involve the study of stabilization, orbit ejection, recovery techniques, vehicle separation as related to re-entry, and engine-fuel reliability. All of these investigations are necessary for the development of space vehicles and to advance the state of the art in pilotless space operations. Included in the explanation will be the statement that several of the DISCOVERY series are to carry biomedical payloads to test environmental conditions of the upper atmosphere. These flights will be reported as contributing to the joint NASA/ARPA Man in Space program.

4. Addtl explanations:

a. Patrick AFB is crowded and new facilities will be available at the PMR so launchings will be conducted from the latter location. Range safety considerations make it impossible to launch in an easterly direction and take advantage of the speed of the earth's rotation. To launch in a westerly direction would be to accept too large a speed penalty. Accordingly, it is necessary to accept the 165-180 degree direction of launch which implies a polar orbit.

b. The use of polar orbits will have further advantage of permitting the near future a test of installed equipment in the early warning net.

c. Later launchings will contain equipmt to study solar power, IR early warning and terminal guidance control, and to conduct model testing of maneuverable space vehicles.